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# Some tall tales of Soviet counter-espionage



## The Communist World: by Victor Zorza

RUSSIA'S secret police is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary in a blaze of press publicity. Double agents proliferate, vicious Western spies infiltrate, high-minded Soviet security officers investigate, and occasionally exterminate what they cannot otherwise irradicate.

Invariably, the Western intelligence services come off second best. There is the case of one Afonov, who turned up in the Soviet Union complete with radio transmitter, codes, and secret ink. We are not told what happened to "Afonov," but his equipment fell into the hands of the KGB, the State Security Committee, which then used its own radio operator to send two false messages on his behalf.

"The replies from abroad confirmed that 'Afonov' was still trusted." But it was possible that the Western centre might tumble to what was going on, because every radio operator has his own characteristic manner, which can be identified in much the same way as a man's handwriting.

### False messages

Therefore, to make sure that "Afonov" was not discovered, the KGB found a pretext for changing over to communication by letter, and fed false information to the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) for eight years, in order to find out what the Americans were interested in and to study the various methods of communication used by US Intelligence.

That, at any rate, is what the KGB says. But it cannot really be sure that this is exactly what happened. Perhaps the Americans did tumble to it straight away, but continued to play the radio game for reasons of their own. After all, if the Russians thought that the Americans suspected nothing, then the CIA might have been able to feed false information just as efficiently as the KGB claims to have done.

Alternatively, the KGB story might be only partly true. It may be, for instance, that "Afonov" was genuinely working for his American masters for something like eight years, that he was captured only towards the end of that period, and that the KGB has concocted the present story in order to discredit the valuable information he had sent during that time.

The details of another case, which the KGB regards as a "big game" with the Americans, appear more credible—though only on the face of it. In these matters it is never safe to assume that surface appearances are true. Two spies named Herbert and Boris were captured, so the KGB story goes, on arrival in the Soviet Union and agreed to cooperate with the Russians. Herbert informed the CIA of his "safe" arrival, and added that he had "lost" Boris in the course of a clash with the guards while crossing the frontier.

The CIA then sent in another agent to work with Herbert, who was instructed to meet the new arrival. The new man—who might have been sent to check Herbert's story—was promptly captured by the KGB. Herbert told the Americans that the replacement had not materialised while the KGB, to divert possible suspicions, planted on British Intelligence a report—which it knew would be passed on to the Americans—that an unknown man was killed in a shooting match with border guards at the very time and place that the new arrival was due to be crossing the frontier.

The purpose of the game, the Russians claim, was to lure into their net a far more important American agent. To show that everything was in order, Boris was shown to have been "lost" only temporarily—he was reunited with Herbert, and they both did great things together.

So promising did their work appear that an agent with much greater experience was sent to discuss further possibilities with them. His knowledge was so extensive that, when he was captured, he was able to give the Russians much detailed information about the activities and plans of American intelligence—or so they say.

### Double agents

A somewhat different "game" was played by the KGB when it sent one of its men to the West, so that he might be "recruited" by one of the Western intelligence services, which "trained" him and then sent him back to Russia. He was landed at night on the Black Sea coast, and for five years supplied the West with seemingly important but false information.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of these stories is that they all feature double agents—almost as if they intended to suggest that all spies today are sooner or later bound to end as double agents. There is little doubt, indeed, that this is exactly what happens to any spy that is caught. He is far more useful to his captors if he agrees to cooperate with them than when he is simply put away in prison for the rest of his life.

Alternatively, when a spy is discovered, he may be left undisturbed for a time, and false information will be put in his way so that he might unwittingly mislead his masters. The Russians now claim that Colonel Penkovsky, who had transmitted so much valuable information to the West through Greville Wynne, was "deliberately left free for a certain time."

But here is one case in which, if a double game was played, the Russians were the losers. No one knows how many such games may be going on, and who is the winner on balance. But the boastfulness of the KGB is not necessarily a mark of success. It might equally well be a sign of insecurity.

For the KGB is not simply a counter-intelligence organisation. Perhaps its most important task is to guard the internal stability of the Soviet Union against the bacteria of political discontent which are eating away the once monolithic base of Communist power. In this task it has been signally unsuccessful. The removal of the Stalinist terror and the emergence of a new generation which cannot be intimidated by memories of the past has made this part of the KGB's operations increasingly ineffective.

The trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel was not an indication of the KGB's success, but a reminder of its failure. It showed that the two writers were able to smuggle their books out of Russia for a number of years—and that many of their acquaintances, including party members, who knew what was going on had refused to denounce the writers to the police. Yet it is clear that for several years the whole vast apparatus of the KGB was trying to track down the two men who had no weapons other than the love and the trust of their friends.

### Not trusted

This vast organisation, with its headquarters and offices in every town, its hired informers, and its private armies, its frontier guards and postal censors and telephone-tappers, and the myriad other hangers on of the police state, is clearly proving a considerably financial burden as well as a political liability.

Mr Khrushchev's dismantling of the Stalin-Beria police machine was far from complete. Virtually every head of the KGB has proved to be a political threat to the other leaders. The dismissal last year of Mr Semichastny in circumstances suggesting that he had participated in an effort to challenge the established leadership shows that the heads of the political police are still not to be trusted.

What guarantee can the present leadership have that in a new political crisis his successor,

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